Authentic Role Play

A Political Solution to an Existential Paradox

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Abstract: Most social roles require role identification from the side of the role occupant, yet whoever identifies him- or herself with his or her social roles thereby *mistakes him- or herself for what he or she is not*, because role identity is determined by other people's normative expectations, whereas self-identity is self-determined. This paper first develops an interpretation of this existential paradox of role identity, and then suggests a Rousseauvian perspective on how the tension between being oneself and playing one's social roles may be a matter of politics rather than a matter of the metaphysics of selfhood. The paper concludes with a cautionary remark on just how much Jacobinism a political solution to the existential paradox of role identity might entail.

I. Selfhood and Role Play

The term "social role" comes from sociology and social psychology (cf. Turner 2001). Though the term does not usually figure prominently in current social ontology, it is tightly connected to the more familiar and thoroughly analyzed concept of social status. A social status is a "system of rights and duties" of an agent, or status holder (Linton 1936, 113). The status involves entitlements, which the status holder is collectively accepted to have, and/or commitments to which the status holder is collectively normatively expected to conform. The way in which roles relate to social statuses is, in Ralph Linton's words, that the role is the "dynamic aspect" of a social status, that is, the "putting into effect" or exercising of the rights and duties by the status holder. Robert K. Merton summarizes Linton's view as follows: "[The] concept of social role refers to the behavior of status-occupants that is oriented toward the patterned expectations of others (who accord the rights and exact the obligations)" (Merton 1968, 41). In Erving Goffman's words, "role consists of the activity the incumbent would engage in were he to act solely in terms of the normative demands upon someone in his position" (Goffman 1972, 73). Goffman distinguishes this "normative sense" of the role from actual "role performance" (ibid.). To suit the theatrical connotations of the term "role", a status-holding agent may be called an *actor.* Examples of social roles are what one does as a professor, a husband, and a friend, and it is obvious that roles are core features of social life. Role theory has always emphasized that individual human beings play multiple roles. The term "societal integration" is sometimes used to capture the degree to which society members are "subject to the strain of incompatible social roles" (Merton 1968, 170), a strain that can be reduced by conventionalization and contextualization. Sometimes an individual human being's "social role" is distinguished from the "total person" in the literature (e.g. Merton 1968, 263). Yet it may seem equally plausible to assume that "the total person" – or perhaps even personhood as such – is itself a social status, and that whatever dynamic aspects there are to being a person is thus a social role, though a somewhat special one. To be a person is a *general role* in that it is the exercise of the status of an agent who is recognized as an actor, that is, a target of normative expectations and thus an actual or potential player of *specific* roles.

Normative expectations differ from cognitive expectations (predictions) in that the former have a "world-to-mind" (or rather: "world-to-norm") direction of fit, whereas the direction of fit is "mind-to-world" in the case of expectations of the cognitive kind. The difference at stake here can be illustrated with the difference between your expectation that the weather at the destination of your holiday trip will be fine (a prediction), and your expectation that the staff of your hotel will treat you politely (a normative expectation). Imagine that it turns out that neither of your expectation is matched by the facts – the weather is bad, and the staff is impolite. Typically, you will react differently in either case: In the case of the weather, the mismatch between the expectation and the expected facts is to blame to the expectation (your prognosis was simply mistaken, "mind" has failed to fit the world), whereas in the case of the manners of the staff, the facts – the staff – are to blame for the mismatch (the world has failed to fit the mind). Put in sociological jargon, normative expectations differ from cognitive expectations in that they are "counterfactually stabilized" (Luhmann 1968, 36) – that is, they are immune to disconfirmation by the facts in the sense that you are not rationally required and perhaps not even rationally permitted to drop an expectation of that kind simply because that there is evidence that the expectation may turn out not to be matched by the facts – which would be rather irrational in the cognitive case.

The range of potential targets for normative expectations is tightly limited. If you don't have any normative expectations about the weather, this is because you don't think the weather is the sort of entity that is susceptible to social norms. Targets of normative expectations are assumed to be agents that may do what they are expected to do because this is what they *should* do, and where the norm is of the generalized kind; this is to say that normative expectations are targeted at *actors,* that is, they expect of agents to perform their role. Especially since from an etymological point of view, the concept of a person comes from the same theatrical vocabulary, it is not a far step to say that the concepts of an actor and a person are one and the same. Persons, and only persons, are potential targets of generalized normative expectations, as they, and only they, are status-occupants in the sense of players of social roles.

There are striking similarities between this view of what it means to be a person and a wide-spread view of being "a self", or of "selfhood". Many authors think that personhood is not only a sort of social meta-status but indeed the nature and essence of what it means to "be oneself". A first reference would be Hegel's (and, to some degree, Fichte's) claim that it is wholly within relations of (mutual) recognition that subjectivity, or selfhood, comes to be. Closer to the body of literature mentioned above, early sociology and social psychology suggested that "one's self" is constituted by "social reference" – Charles Horton Cooley has captured this idea in his concept of the looking-glass self: "A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person, the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification" (Cooley 1902, 184). Though this is not spelled out in terms of social roles and normative expectation, the element of pride or shame clearly refers to values and ideals, that is, to the domain of the normative, and the kind of expectation these values involve. Cooley suggests that "the social self" goes all the way down, and that there is no meaning of "I" that does not involve the kind of social-normative mirroring that he brings to the fore (e.g., Cooley 1902, 127). Within his "social interactionism", Charles Herbert Mead, by contrast, does distinguish between "the I" that is a source of spontaneity and that seems to be prior to the process of the internalization of other people's attitudes, and the "me" or the "self", which emerges from "taking the role of the other" (Mead 1934, xxi) and becomes a social role to the degree that it is normatively generalized. But there seems to be no clash, or even tension, between "I" and my "self" in Mead's conception, as me, myself, and I may be "fused", so that there is no conflict between being oneself – or "I" – and the kind of playing a social role that is involved in the "me", or "self":

"In a social 'me' the various attitudes of all the others are expressed in terms of our own gesture, which represents the part we are carrying out in the social cooperative activity. Now, the thing we actually do, the words we speak, our expressions, our emotions, those are the 'I'; but they are fused with the 'me' […]. The act itself which I have spoken of as the 'I' in the social situation is a source of unity of the whole, while the ‘me’ is the social situation in which this act can express itself” (Mead 1934, 279).

“Man is essentially the role-taking animal”, Mead claims (Mead 1934, xxi), and if this is interpreted in a sufficiently wide way, this fits nicely with what is currently claimed about the basic structure of what it means to be a human subject in such philosophical programs as social externalism, normative pragmatism, the theory of communicative action, and practice theory. One way of putting the basic claim is to say that selfhood involves intentional attitudes with (propositional) content, and this requires a community of agents who mutually recognize each other as persons, that is, as occupants of the social role of competent and responsible cognizers, or even a linguistic practice with mutual “score keeping” of entitlements and commitments. Mutual score keeping is just another way of describing the assignment of roles. On the practical side, acting requires some form of knowledge what it is one is doing, and this involves “forms of action” which are constituted by social norms, so that there is no action to speak of outside of a system of social role play.

The emerging view is what one might call *conventionalism about selfhood*: having an intentional attitude of any sort is basically a social status, and if even a minimal conception of selfhood involves having intentional attitudes, selfhood is occupying a social status, and being oneself is thus playing one’s social role all the way down.

It may not seem obvious that existentialist philosophy should be construed as incompatible with conventionalism about selfhood. Many recent conventionalist authors have found confirmation for their views in Heidegger’s “Being and Time”, and indeed, many quotes from Heidegger’s analysis of being-there can be construed in that way. According to these passages, being oneself is basically being “one-self”, and the “one-self” (*man-selbst*) is the player of a social role in the domain of established communal practices and the public disclosedness of the world. In this view, the “anyone” pervades all of our being-there, and permeates our intentionality – to use a term that Heidegger avoids – all the way down. In the literature, this line has been followed by such interpreters as Hubert Dreyfus, Robert Brandom, and John Haugeland; in their view, social normativity – and thus social roles – are constitutive of our being there, and being there is indeed a social status. These authors have not ignored that Heidegger sometimes states rather clearly that the “anyone” – being “one-self” – is inauthentic, and that while inauthenticity may be pervasive and primary in some sense, it is not without alternative. Adapting some pieces of standard social role theory, this is construed by some of the conventionalists merely as saying that competent (“expert”) role players need some role distance, that is, the knowledge of how to apply the rules, when to deviate from the roles, and the ability to negotiate role conflicts.

In a different (and presumably more adequate) reading of Heidegger’s “Being and Time” (as well as of much of Sartre’s philosophy), however, being oneself and playing a social role are in a fundamental tension with each other that goes well beyond the demands of role distance and role conflicts. In this view, playing *any* role involves a basic self-misapprehension, or self-misunderstanding. In Heideggerian terms, conceiving of oneself as “one-self” somehow misconceives of one’s own being as “anyone’s” (Heidegger 1962 [1927]). Being oneself, in terms of conceiving of and living one’s life as one’s own rather than just as “anybody’s”, is incompatible with conceiving of oneself and one’s life as a bundle and succession of social roles, or even with conceiving of oneself and one’s life in terms of the social role of a person. The following is an attempt to unearth the insight behind this view in a way that is not limited to Heideggerian jargon.

A good place to start is Sartre’s example for the problem of the inauthenticity of role play in *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre 1992 [1943], 59f.). To illustrate his version of inauthenticity –

he calls it *mauvaise foi* – Sartre presents the example of a waiter who plays his role over-eagerly, and who is, as Sartre puts it, "playing at *being* a waiter" – acting as if his role as a waiter were something he *is* rather than what he *plays.*

It is tempting to follow the conventionalist interpreters of existentialism and see this just as a case of too much role embracement and lack of role distance. Let's look at the role theoretic sources of the conventionalist reading and see what this entails. "Role embracement" and "role distance" are concepts developed by Erving Goffman within his dramaturgical model of social action. Goffman argues that roles come with what he calls a "role self" (1972, 107), which is "virtual", and it is with regard to the way roles are played that he distinguishes role embracement from role distance. Role embracement is "to disappear completely into the virtual self available in the situation": it is one's full "acceptance" of a role. Goffman adds that "to embrace a role is to be embraced by it" (Goffman 1972, 94). Role distance*,* by contrast, is "a wedge between the individual and his role": "the individual is actually denying not the role but the virtual self that is implied in the role for all accepting performers" (ibid. 95), and Goffman argues that role distance is important to manage the multiplicity of "role selves" and mitigate role conflicts (ibid. 117ff.), but also within complex interaction systems themselves, because "certain maneuvers which act to integrate the system require for their execution individuals who do not fully embrace their situated selves" (ibid., 107). Put bluntly, you often have to depart from your script to be effective in complex interactions. In this sense, the "self" that is not a "situated self", not a "role self", has itself a social function, and "social situations as such retain some weight and reality in their own right by drawing on role distance" (ibid., 116): it matters to the way in which we are together that we express to each other that our roles are not who we are, but what we play – and this seems to be exactly what Sartre is missing in his waiter.

Within Goffman's dramaturgical model of interaction, role distance is part of the play, as it were. Role distance requires of the actors on the social stage that they display a sense of how they are not their roles, and are able to act accordingly, that is, depart from their scripts where this is needed. Yet this "wedge between the individual and his role" is not what the existentialist analysis uncovers. Goffman's "wedge" is not between a self that is, dramaturgically speaking, "off stage", and one's role "on stage", but between specific roles and the meta-role of "the individual", or a person, in the conventionalist sense. Heidegger's analysis of the "anyone" makes plain that authenticity is not to be confused with role distance, where Heidegger states that it is not only those who eagerly embrace and identify with the social standards that are inauthentic, but those who distance themselves from those standards as "one" does, too. Inauthenticity is not only a matter of "catching up" with others' normative expectations in the fulfillment of one's role; the "one-self" is equally concerned with maintaining a distance from what the general standards are. Heidegger calls this "distantiality" (Heidegger 1962 [1927], 126ff.), and even though Heidegger conceives of distantiality in terms of concrete others as the "constant care as to the way one differs from them", and does not seem to have a worked-out conception of social role and role distance, his analysis suggests a reading of both Goffmanean "role embracement" and "role distance" as features of the existential distantiality of inauthentic existence. Contrary to what the conventionalist interpreters believe, the tension between playing a social role and being oneself, or between inauthenticity and authenticity, is thus not the tension between role embracement and role distance, as being oneself is neither role embracement nor role distance. Rather, the tension is with role identification *as such,* both in terms of embracement and distance. It does not matter to the question of authenticity whether you're performing your act with more embracement or more distance. However intricate and sociologically interesting the interplay or dialectics of role embracement and role distance may be (cf. Maynz 1970), the existentialist problem is not with a particular *way* of playing one's role, but with a conflict between being oneself and playing one's role as such.

II. The Paradox of Role Identification

Following is a suggestion about what the existentialist point is, and to see it, we need to unearth a structure beneath role embracement and role distance. A point to start is the way in which role play, however distant it may be, is usually *intentional.* This may not initially seem plausible for *any* role play. Sometimes we play a role unintentionally or unwittingly, such as in the case in which we find out only after the fact that in a certain constellation, our role was that of the scapegoat, or perhaps in the case in which against all of our intentions, we find ourselves aggrandized and glamorized as heroes on which others model themselves. It is true that some roles are not usually played knowingly. Yet where people have no knowledge whatsoever of the status position they occupy, it seems more plausible to say that their roles are "played with them" rather than that these are roles that they themselves play. The status involved in such roles are of the *honorific* kind – including "dishonorific" statuses –, and it is in virtue of an actor's role performance in intentional role play that such statuses are assigned. This is to say: non-intentional roles presuppose intentional role play.

Intentional role play involves several elements. First, in order to play a role intentionally, an actor needs to have some knowledge of the role he or she is playing, that is, some understanding of the system of commitments and entitlements that is the role status in question. Also, intentional role play involves a volitive element; even if we may not see any intrinsic value in playing a certain role, or if we play our role with a great deal of role distance, we have to *accept* the role to play it intentionally, and this involves having a pro-attitude of some sort towards the role in question. Yet knowing what the role is, and wanting it to be played, is not sufficient for intentional role engagement. In order for role engagement to be intentional, you have to relate to the role in question *as your own* – let's call this crucial feature of role play *role self-identification,* and take a closer look at what it is.

Role self-identification entails an attitude of a particular kind, and it is not without reason that in the following, it is approached first-personally. I may know exactly what commitments and entitlements are involved in being the professor of Political and Social Philosophy at the University of Vienna, I may have a pro-attitude towards that position in the sense that I *desire* to be in that position, and still not know that I am in that position, that is, that *I* am the professor of Political and Social Philosophy at the University of Vienna. Moreover, no amount of observational, inferential, third-personal knowledge about the holder of the status of the professor of Political and Social Philosophy at the University of Vienna constitutes the sort of knowledge in question. I may know his every feature and move, and still fail to know that he is *I.* The well-studied philosophical point here is that the kind of knowledge required for role identification is of the sort known under labels such as first-personal knowledge, pre-reflective self-awareness, non-observational, non-inferential, or "groundless" self-knowledge. It is notoriously difficult to say what exactly that special "knowledge" is, but it can be characterized by pointing out what that "knowledge" *does,* and these functions turn out to be fundamental for being a cognizer and an agent.

First, groundless self-"knowledge" *establishes* our identity (with regard to existence rather than essence). It does not settle *what* we are, but it does settle *that* we are. The "knowledge" in question is the feature in virtue of which even a fundamental self-misconception is still a *self*-misconception, such as in the case in which I mistake myself for somebody else, where it is still true that it is *myself* whom I mistake for somebody else. Heidegger does not put the issue in quite these terms, but he does emphasize that even Dasein's inauthenticity (in which Dasein mistakes itself for something it is not) it is a form of relating to *itself.* The way in which the view of oneself as "one-self" is correct in that it is of oneself one conceives of

"one-self", but it is mistaken in that it fails to grasp its being as its own. It is in this way that being oneself – in the sense of knowing oneself and living one's life as one's own – is not being "one-self" and playing a series of social roles.
Second, groundless self-"knowledge" is the feature in virtue of which our attitudes (beliefs, intentions etc.) are our *commitments* – a feature which Heidegger, in his existential analysis, seems to appeal to in his remarks on the role of "resolve". A simple way to illustrate this function is Moore's paradox, that is, attitudes of the form "p, but I don't believe it". As "p" is self-known as a belief, "p" contradicts "I don't believe it". Self-knowledge is the way in which our attitudes are *ours* in such a way that they *commit* us.
Third, self-"knowledge" is the feature in virtue of which there is first-person *authority.* This is not to say that we are always the best interpreters of what's on our minds, but under usual circumstances, we grant each other some privilege in the interpretation of what our thoughts and intentions are. One way of interpreting this emphasizes that the authority in question is the special role of the *maker* of the attitude in question; we are the ones who make up our own minds, and or privileged position should therefore not come as a surprise (Moran 2001). In this view, the self-relation that makes a subject is not primarily of the cognitive, but rather of the practical kind. Self-"making" rather than self-knowledge marks the way in which we are subjects. Though some of the proponents of this view have relied heavily on the existentialist literature, Heidegger's view seems to be neither of the cognition-focused nor on the practice-based camp. Heidegger's view seems to be that the kind of self-relation that Dasein – the subject – is, is of the *affective* kind *(Befindlichkeit).*

If this structure is presupposed in role play, however, a fundamental problem arises: the kind of identity we have in virtue of self-knowledge, self-awareness, or perhaps self-feeling – let us call it self-identity –, while being presupposed in role play, is at the same time in tension with the kind of identity which we have as role occupants – let's call this role-identity. Role-identity presupposes self-identity, as we have seen – but it also contradicts self-identity, as we shall see now.

First, as self-identity is self-constituted, self-ascertained, self-established, and self-determined, it seems plain that as self-knowers, we are what we are in virtue of ourselves. Role-identity, by contrast, is socially pre-determined, and it is not self-constituted, but rather constituted by the social norms that determine the role status, and by collective acceptance of occupying this status. Or, put more bluntly: as subjects, we are self-made – as role occupants, we are made what we are by others. Even if there are, of course, roles that require quite some effort from the side of the prospective occupants – such as the role of a university professor – one's own effort alone is not what makes one a role occupant, but rather its recognition by others according to accepted rules, in this case by an institution. In terms of self-constitution, our subjectivity is what's up to ourselves; our roles, however, are always largely up to others.
Second, it seems that in virtue of one's self-identity, *only one's own attitudes are one's commitments* ("p, but I don't believe it" is a paradox of commitments, "p, but you don't/she doesn't believe it", however, is not). Again, this is completely different where role identity is concerned. In virtue of one's role identity, one is committed by other people's generalized normative expectations. To put it pointedly: as a subject, you're committed by what you yourself believe and want, but as a role occupant, you are determined by other people's attitudes. To be a role-occupant is to be normatively bound by the structure of normative expectations that make up your status; role-identity always commits to other people's views.
Third, self-identity is the authority of the first person, while role-identity is societal authority. As a subject, you're in a position to know what it is you're up to in a way that is privileged over other people's views of your project. In your role identity, however, it is other people's views, and the social normative structure they express, that determine what it is you're doing.

Consider Davidons's paradigm case of an action, the raising of an arm. From the subjective point of view, it is certainly the description under which you intended your raising of the arm that is relevant for the question of what it is you're doing. Yet if you're in a role context, things might be rather different. If you're a policeman standing on a crossroad and raise your arm, what's in your head does not seem quite as relevant to the question of what it is you're doing than the rules of traffic regulation. In this sense, it is "society" rather than just your own self that is authoritative in your role identity.

To sum up, role identity is socially established, heteronomous, and under social authority. All of this is in conflict with what we *really* are, and contradicts our self-identity, because as ourselves, we are self-constituted rather than socially established, autonomous rather than heteronomous, and self-authorized rather than under social authority. Though existentialism has often been accused of misunderstanding the social, it is certainly a merit of this tradition to have reminded us about the difference between being oneself and playing a social role.

As seen in the last section, self-identity is not role-identity. As seen in section 1, however, role-identity requires of the role occupants role self-identification. If we take these two insights together, we run into an existential paradox. If role identification is to judge of oneself that one is the occupant of this or that role, one self-identifies with an identity that is not one's self-identity. Playing a social role implies identifying first-personally with a social status position that is not what we are first-personally, but through others; thus there seems to be a deep truth to the everyday slogan that in our social roles, "we are not ourselves". This conflict between self-identity in terms of groundless self-"knowledge" and role identity is at the core of Heidegger's notion of *inauthenticity,* as well as of Sartre's *mauvaise foi.* Conventionalist theories of selfhood cannot account for this feature of role play, as they have no account of self-identity, and thus no sense for the way in which we are not ourselves in playing our social roles. Existentialism, however, does account for self-identity, and against the conventionalist thrust of some recent interpretations, it should be emphasized that one of the merits of existentialism is to bring the conflict between self-identity and role-identity to the fore. We should read Heidegger's concept of inauthenticity as an analysis of the way in which in playing our social roles, we mistake ourselves for something we are not, and thus live past our own lives in such a way that we are mistaken about ourselves. Role identification, the existentialist claim goes, comes at the cost of a life that is not lived "as one's own".

III. A Rousseauvian Reconciliation

In many cases of real-life role play, the existentialist claim has much intuitive plausibility. Yet at the same time, it seems exaggerated as a general thesis, as it has much less plausibility in other cases. The existentialist claim may seem plausible enough with regards to roles that are really "just a job", such as Sartre's waiter's. Nobody would expect the role occupant to fully identify with *such* a role, as it seems appropriate to see such roles as what we *play* rather than as what we *are.* But not all of our roles are of that kind. Consider for example the roles of a father or a friend. If that's just something you *play*, you cannot *be* a devout father, or a truly close friend; you can't play such roles, you have to *be* them. And indeed, it seems implausible to claim that we are not living our lives "as our own" if we identify with *these* roles, and the theatrical vocabulary, as applied to such roles, seems less than metaphorical. Thus the problem is that there is good reason to accept the existentialist paradox of role identification for roles which we play but with which we are not *truly* identified, as it were, but it seems hard to accept for those roles that are closest to our heart, and that seem to be part and parcel of who we *are.* If this is right, the paradox of role identification cannot be the last word on the relation between selfhood and role play. If we're not mistaken in the belief that some roles are what we play, while other roles make up what we truly are, a way has to be found how *in principle* (and perhaps under special conditions)*,* self-identity and role-identity can be reconciled. The task ahead is to show how what we are through other people's normative expectation may – perhaps under special circumstances – be what we are through ourselves. In the history of philosophy, it seems to be Jean-Jacques Rousseau who has addressed this issue most clearly. By contrast to conventionalist theories of selfhood, Rousseau does have an account of first-personal self-identity, and a clear sense of how self-identity conflicts with role-identity, or the living of one's life "in the eyes of others", in his critical account of civilization. Yet by contrast to our existentialist authors, he also has an account of how this tension can be overcome, and this account is political in nature – the social contract.

Following is not an interpretation of Rousseau's account, however, but an independent reconstruction that is, however, Rousseauvian in spirit. Two preparatory steps lead up to the final argument: first, an account of joint action (a.), second, a joint-action based account of social norms (b.), which finally leads to a notion of self-identity that includes role-identity (c.).

a. Complex individual intentional actions presuppose that the agent who intends to act is, by his or her intention, *committed* to carrying out the various steps involved in the action. If preparing your coffee is something you do intentionally, your taking the pot, heating the oven, preparing the coffee powder do not just *happen* to ensue in such a way as to result in the preparation of the coffee; rather, they are *bound* to come together in virtue of your intention. The way in which complex individual intentional action is *temporally extended* is the way in which *joint intentional action* is *socially extended.* Joint intentional action is not a distribution of individual actions that somehow happens to ensue in a collective action. Our jointly intentional preparing a Sauce Hollandaise together is not an event of the sort in which you happen to pour some oil into a bowl while I happen to stir. Rather, the individual actions are *bound* to come together in virtue of the collective intention. The intention to act jointly presupposes some joint commitment to a distribution of individual contributions; we are jointly committed to make our individual contributions match, and thus to some guideline for the joint action, even though that plan may change.

b. This joint commitment to the matching of individual contributions is important to understand the nature of social norms. Social norms are standardizations of individual contributions to (repeated) joint actions. Social norms thus determine (proto-) roles. An important point, however, is that typically, social norms derive from a previously reached, more or less coincidental equilibrium rather than from an agreed-upon plan. By way of an example, consider the case of a group of participants in a workshop at some new location. Assume there is no pre-determined seating order; the participants will select their seats randomly. After the first coffee break, however, the participants will typically take the *same* seat; the initial random distribution is an equilibrium that is repeatedly "chosen", and it is normatively stabilized: if after the first coffee break, or on the second day of the workshop, you take "my" seat, I probably won't protest since you have not violated a formal norm, but there is a normative structure in place in virtue of which it is "my" seat you have taken (try this on your next workshop if you don't believe it). The "ought" that is the norm of "our way of doing it" derives from the "is" of a first precedent, and it regulates future cases. Quite obviously, however, the normatively stabilized coincidental equilibrium may not be a particularly good equilibrium. In the case of our example, the distribution may not be a Pareto optimum – perhaps a participant who's seat happens to be in the back would be better off in the front, because he is a bit hard of hearing, while a person in the front would be better off in the back, as she needs to write an email during one of the presentations. In this case, there

would be a better distribution than the one that happens to be the norm. In such circumstances, a better norm can issue from joint reasoning and deliberation about the best way to live together, and such reasoning is an important driving force in social life, resulting in changes of "practice forms" and thus of social roles.
c. Joint reasoning and deliberation about the way in which we do things requires of the participants the knowledge that our norms are "up to us". That knowledge is first-personal or self-knowledge, but it is *plural* self-knowledge. It is self-identifying, it is self-committing, and it is self-authorizing (Schmid, forthcoming) and thus involves self-identity. As *plural* self-identity, however, this self-identity is not in contradiction to being identified, committed, and authorized by other people's attitudes, just as long as those other people are *participants* in joint reasoning and deliberation. Singular self-identity is *up to me,* and while plural identity involves others, it is not *up to them,* but first-personal and thus self-identity: it is *up to us.* Consider again Davidson's case of raising one's arm. Above, we discussed the difference between self-identity and role-identity with regard to the way in which what one is doing by raising one's arm is up to the agent (depending on what he or she wants and believes) or up to social norms (depending on what, in a given situation, raising one's arm *means).* It now turns out that this is not an irreconcilable opposition: from *our* (collective) point of view, what in a given situation, raising one's arm *means* is, after all, *up to us* (it depends on what norms we adopt), and thus itself a matter of self-identity, though the self-identity in question is of the plural rather than the singular kind.

The claim that besides singular self-identity, there is plural self-identity, too, can be put in somewhat more Heideggerian terms (though I'll make no attempt to translate this fully into Heideggerian jargon here). For Heidegger, being-there is potentiality; yet there are potentialities no singular being-there has for him- or herself: there is much we cannot do *alone,* but only *together.* In this sense, joint action opportunities, and activities that involve coordination, are *being-there,* but they are not distributions of singular being-there, but *being-there together.* There are two ways of relating to the potentialities that are a collective's. One way of relating to them is to take them to be pre-determines by existing social standards, or quasi a priori "forms of action", which can then only be followed or violated. A collective that relates to its potentialities in that way thus mistakes itself for what it is not: it takes itself to be a *distribution of singular being-there* instead of taking itself for what it is: being-there together. Another way of relating to collective potentialities is to see them as what they truly are, that is, as the way we are together that is always open to new forms of being-there. The being-there that is aware of the way in which such potentialities are open to self-determination is not a singular or individual being-there, but a plural or collective being-there. As individuals, we can only follow or violate social norms. As collectives, however, we can *determine* them. They are transparent as what they are: *up to us, collectively.*

Thus there is a distinction between two ways in which social norms can be seen: either as restrictions imposed by other's expectations or as collectively accepted. Both perspectives are first-personal, but only the latter extends to the plural form of the first person, too. In this view, norms – and thus the expectations that come with occupying a status, or playing a role – are not external. Roles are what we *are* rather than what we play insofar as the norms that constitute the statuses which we occupy in role play express our *collective self-identity: who we are, as a group.* This opens a perspective on a way in which role identification is compatible with self-identity. Role play is authentic, and thus not incompatible with self-identity, insofar as the norms that constitute my role issue from a community of which I am a member, and which is such that we, together, know that the normative infrastructure of our shared life is up to us, collectively, and thus expresses our collective self-determination.

Under these conditions, identifying with one's roles is not paradoxical. One's roles may be external to one's singular self-identity, but they are internal to one's plural self-identity. Role play is inauthentic where one accepts one's roles from one's singular point of view, where other's normative expectations as to one's behavior are alien to one's "being oneself". In many cases, it seems more than adequate to "play" rather than "be" one's role: if you just need to take a job to make a living, and if you do not have much choice, it would be strange, and indeed expressive of a sort of self-misidentification, to see yourself as the "co-author" of the norms that make up your role. Perhaps this is what's wrong with Sartre's waiter: he acts as if his role issued from a view of how we should organize ourselves which he fully endorses, where it is really just a predetermined status to which he conforms, and which he does not co-authorize. Existentialist philosophy is right in pointing out that any such role identification is deeply mistaken. What's wrong with the existentialist view of the situation, however, is that Sartre (and, for that matter, Heidegger) makes it appear as if this was a problem that comes with role structure *as such,* rather than as a consequence of a *particular* role structures. As a regular customer at his Café de Flore, Sartre probably knew exactly that the waiter he chose as an example was not in a position to be *truly* identified with his role. Yet it is easy to imagine different conditions: imagine by way of an example a waiter who is a member of a cooperative that jointly runs the café; imagine that the cooperative sees running a café as a worthwhile and fulfilling venture, and that his particular role in the joint venture is a result both of his own inclination and the view of the group. In this case, our waiter's role identity is continuous with his plural self-identity, rather than being in an insoluble contradiction with self-identity.

The way to be yourself in your social roles is thus, first, to be self-identified in a way that extends to the plural – that is, to think and act in first-person plural terms; second, to correctly see the social norms that make up your statuses and the structure of other people's expectations in which you find yourself entangled as expressions of plural self-determination of your group, and third, to accept your particular status role as your own contribution. These conditions place tight restrictions on un-alienated role identity. In political terms, these conditions involve a radically enlightened and democratic ideal; they basically demand that the role structure as well as the assignment of roles to particular individuals derive from a joint plan of how to live together that is, among the participants, agreed-upon in first-person plural terms. It is only on the base of the participant's self-identity as a group that the members' singular self-identity is not in contradiction with role identity in the way analyzed above.

The basic insight that it is in terms of a shared self-identity that social structure, and thus role-identity, need not be in conflict with individual self-determination is Rousseauvian, and it is no coincidence that Rousseau spelled it out in political terms. This leads to the question of just how much Jacobinism the political agenda of authentic role play entails. Rousseau is certainly too quick in assimilating plural self-identity to a collective individual identity by calling the "common self" a singular "moi commun" rather than what it is, a plural "nous", and we may not agree with his view of the institutional requirements for un-alienated role identity. Also, it may be argued against a radically Jacobinist program of democratic de-alienation of the social role structure that in many spheres of social life, alienated role identity is a feature rather than a bug. It certainly matters to our living together that there are many roles that are "just jobs", that is, roles we *play* rather than *are.* Limiting our roles to those with which we are fully self-identified would severely limit the things we can do; the possibility of just "hiring somebody for a job" rather than including a new member into the board and reaching a new agreement on the planned venture obviously matters. And insofar as this take on the matter is, in turn, jointly accepted by the participant individuals, it may be the case that even though they *play* their roles rather than *being* them, there is a sense in which the general role of the player of specific roles is something with which the participant individuals can plurally self-identify.

It is thus important to distinguish the inauthenticity of the role identification of those who do not co-author the norms that constitute their status from the situation of those who co-author a social structure that allows for roles that are “just a job”. In the latter case, there is still a sense in which we’re not fully ourselves in our specific social roles as the holders of the jobs we happen to have – but though our specific roles are “just played”, there is a good sense in which the occasional holders of *some* job is what we *truly are* – as long as we, together, agree that a social structure that extends beyond voluntary associations or cooperatives, and includes a liberal job market where role engagement is traded as a commodity (not to speak of some coerced roles assigned by authority of the state) should be the way in which we live together.

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